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FM USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9501

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNNAR/VIENNA NARCOTICS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0260

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0292

RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 0454

RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI IMMEDIATE 0062

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 UNVIE VIENNA 000242

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2023

TAGS: PREL SNAR AF PAK IR IT

SUBJECT: ITALIAN COUNTERNARCOTICS COOPERATION WITH IRAN

GOOD, BUT VARIABLE

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Classified By: Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte for reasons 1.4 (c) and (e)
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¶1. (C) Summary. On May 20, Msnoff met with an Italian counterpart, Marco Prencipe, who recently left a four-year post in Tehran to discuss the effectiveness of Iranian cooperation with the Italians on counternarcotics efforts. For the most part, cooperation has been successful, and Italy and Iran have signed a number of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), most of which focus on judicial and police cooperation and are technical in nature. However, when international pressure on Iran increased in 2006, the bilateral counternarcotics relationship suffered and Italy was forced to work solely through multilateral fora. Prencipe argued that U.S.-Iranian counternarcotics cooperation is possible, but that Iran has a different concept of time and does not feel any urgency to cooperate, despite its probable interest in engagement. Nevertheless, Italy wants to use its G-8 presidency to convey that Iran is important and should be engaged. Iran can be part of the solution, but we need to recognize its positive role as well as its negative role. At the same time, Prencipe argued, Iran needs to show that it can be a constructive part of the solution. End Summary.

Italian Cooperation Focused on Technical, Regional Approaches

¶2. (C) Italian Msnoff Marco Prencipe, who left a four-year post in Tehran last fall, told Msnoff on May 20 that, in general, bilateral cooperation between Italy and Iran on counternarcotics has been good since it first posted a drug liaison officer (DLO) to Tehran and increased bilateral cooperation in 2005. (Comment: UNODC recently told Msnoff that the Italians have the only outstanding Western drug liaison officer posted to Iran. End Comment.) Italy and Iran have signed a number of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), most of which focus on judicial and police cooperation and are technical in nature. Cooperation has focused on countertrafficking, especially of precursors and psychotropics, and a joint agreement on security and transnational crime. Iran and Italy do a few exchanges each year which include training, most of which happens in Italy and is centered on programs for judges and magistrates. These exchanges largely happen between the anti-mafia units in Italy and the Iranian Judiciary. Iran has also been interested in how Italian data collection and processing is done in the judiciary and police forces.

¶3. (C) When Iranian Drug Control Headquarters Head Moghadam was in Vienna for the Commission on Narcotic Drugs,

he met with the head of the Italian delegation, which Prencipe noted was unusual. They discussed demand reduction efforts, and Iran was interested in Italy's comprehensive approach to the issue, which Prencipe perceives as very close to the U.S. approach.

¶4. (C) Prencipe believes that the Italian bilateral relationship on counternarcotics works where other relationships with the West have failed because Iran sees a political value to countering its international isolation, and Italy has been a long-term partner on a variety of issues. Nevertheless, he noted that it is sometimes difficult for their DLO to keep close contact with his Iranian interlocutors and in 2006, when the international pressure on Iran increased, Italy, too, was forced to work through multilateral fora on counternarcotics.

¶5. (C) Prencipe argued that Iran has a real interest in the counternarcotics issue and thus, cooperation with the U.S. might be possible. However, to make a decision to engage with the U.S., even on this issue, Iranian leaders will need to present cooperation to the elite and the public as justifiable. Iran does not feel any urgency to engage on the issue, he said, because Iran has a different concept of time than the West, but Iran's failure to move quickly does not mean that Iran does not take the opportunity to engage seriously. "They probably do," he noted. At the same time, Iran wants to capitalize on the "credit" they feel they deserve for their work to stabilize Afghanistan and counter narcotics trafficking.

¶6. (C) Prencipe also stressed Italy's focus on a regional approach to drug control and his government's belief that Iran can play a positive role in a regional approach if they

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choose to. This is why Rome invited Italy to the upcoming G8 meeting in Trieste. Italy wants to use its G8 presidency to convey that Iran is important and that "we" need to engage Iran. Iran can be part of the solution, but we need to recognize its positive role as well as its negative role. At the same time, Prencipe argued, Iran needs to show that it can be a constructive part of the solution.

Saberi Arrest Probably a Negotiating Tool

¶7. (C) Prencipe noted that he knew Roxana Saberi personally from his time in Iran and was surprised when she was arrested and sentenced so heavily given her lack of focus on politics. Unlike Esfandiareh, whose arrest was likely because of her more political nature, Saberi's work was more like a diary and focused on Iranian culture. Prencipe's personal view was that her arrest was currency for the dialogue with the U.S., and he had not been worried that she would be held for long. He did note, however, that the Iranian government sometimes does punish people for perceived slights to Iranian culture, citing the fact that Golshifteh Farahani, a famous Iranian actress who starred opposite Leonardo diCaprio in Body of Lies, was not allowed back to Iran because of the loose adherence to Islamic values that she displayed in the film. Prencipe also noted that the President's Nowruz speech was effective and that it "looked like an Iranian wrote it." He said that from his perspective, this speech "puts the ball in Iran's court."

SCHULTE